

CITY OF GARDNER

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING



PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

Community Development Block Grant Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

4:00 p.m.

Meeting Room (2nd floor), Manca Annex
Gardner, Massachusetts

1. Community Development Strategy –

The City of Gardner's Community Development Strategy summarizes the City's various efforts to engage in community-based planning and priority setting and to outline a plan of action intended to accomplish specific community development goals. The purpose of the meeting is to obtain input from the public.

FY2022 – FY2025 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The City of Gardner's Community Development Strategy summarizes the City's various efforts to engage in community-based planning and priority setting, staying consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principals, and to outline a plan of action intended to accomplish specific community development goals. The current Community Development Strategy (CDS) will be used to direct resources from all sources toward projects that address those needs identified by the community as high priorities. Acting through its Department of Community Development and Planning, using specifically CDBG funds, projects will lie within the boundaries of the Downtown Urban Renewal Area (D-URA) and the Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Area (MSC-URA).

Housing: Expansion and Retention. This category is consistent with Concentrate Development and Mix Uses and Expand Housing Opportunities.

The City of Gardner is committed to expanding housing opportunities in appropriate locations to meet the needs of Gardner's population. Gardner has partnered with local and regional non-profit and private sector organizations to enhance and rehabilitate properties creating safe and affordable housing and repairing dilapidated buildings. Many of the properties in the D-URA are mixed use properties with retail or commercial endeavors on the first floor and apartments on the upper floors, which due to a variety of reasons, remain mostly vacant. In order to facilitate the redevelopment of these vacant properties, and others throughout the City, the City must increase the quantity and availability of parking, expedite the process for taking control of tax title properties, assess current zoning and promote smart growth districts, address storm water management practices, and partner with local agencies and developers to invest in the existing infrastructure. The City must also continue to support residents by partnering with local banks and non-profit agencies to identify properties that are in pre-foreclosure, distribute information regarding the availability of foreclosure counseling, assist with post-foreclosure issues. Education to first time homebuyers is also crucial in foreclosure prevention.

Economic Development. This category is consistent with Concentrate Development and Mix Uses, Advance Equity, Increase Job and Business Opportunities and Plan Regionally.

There are two distinct economic development goals in the City of Gardner – to diversify the local economy and increase job opportunities by encouraging and facilitating retention and expansion of Gardner based businesses as well as attracting new businesses to Gardner while promoting reinvestment in older industrial and commercial properties. To that end, the City

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continues to coordinate economic development efforts by maintaining funding for the Economic Development Coordinator (EDC) position. Within the role, the EDC continues to implement the approved urban renewal plans; identify and develop a new industrial business park; assist and expand training opportunities for the local workforce; provide support to new and existing businesses throughout Gardner by organizing company tours with potential partners; act as a conduit between the City and the Chamber of Commerce, Square Two, NewVue Communities and other organizations for marketing and technical support such as sign and façade improvements, small business grants and loans, marketing, business expansion efforts and networking with other business owners; and partner with local non-profit agencies to assist in challenges facing the local workforce such as job training, job-related transportation issues, job-related childcare, education and financial literacy and self-sufficiency programs.

Open Space and Recreation. The Sustainable Development principles relevant to this section are to Protect Land and Ecosystems and Use Natural Resources Wisely.

The City of Gardner has a fully updated seven-year Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) that was accepted by the State in 2015. The Plan is currently in the process of being updated. The overall purpose of the OSRP is to provide Gardner's residents with a diverse system of interconnected open space areas and quality recreational opportunities that protect natural resources, promote public health, and enhance the quality of life. Enhancing the quality of life in a community must maintain a careful balance between equity, environment and economy. To meet the overall goal of the OSRP, it is important that the City focus on acquiring additional open space parcels, or more effectively utilize existing land; improve management and maintenance of existing municipally owned open space, including land and bodies of water; increase opportunities for recreation along the Otter River and other waterways; complete the North Central Pathway in partnership with the Town of Winchendon and other neighboring towns; add new equipment and increase maintenance of existing equipment at the existing recreation facilities; look for opportunities to acquire land, or repurpose existing land, for additional recreational facilities and/or fields; construct, replace, and maintain a sidewalk network throughout the City to ensure a safe walkable community; adopt a reduced salt policy; and promote the benefits of donating open space.

Transportation. The Sustainable Development Principle of Provide Transportation Choice is most relevant to this section.

The City's goals include increasing access to transportation options and ensuring safe, accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities, including those with disabilities, allowing safe and convenient travel throughout the City. To that end, the City continues to advocate for increased bus service to allow working parents and the underemployed better access to childcare facilities and employment opportunities; upgrading State Route 2 and improvements to the Community Rail System serving Northern Worcester County, to include the recent addition of the North Central Pathway Connector on Park Street; promote walking and biking opportunities within the City and advocate for bicycle racks on buses to allow travel between communities for recreational purposes; apply appropriate Smart Parking standards and strategies in the target areas and increase the availability of parking in the target areas; continue to upgrade the sidewalks to ADA/MAAB standards and repair deteriorated infrastructure which includes preparing and implementing a pavement management plan; provide better traffic control features such as line painting and cross walks; and increase the enforcement of traffic laws and ordinances.

The City has entered into a Community Compact with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and has created a Complete Streets Policy outlining its commitment in obtaining its transportation goals. The City has received two grants from MassDOT for Complete Streets Projects. The more recent grant will construct part of the North Central Pathway Connector while the previous grant upgraded sidewalk infrastructure and incorporated walking and biking lanes, connecting North Gardner to South Gardner through the City's downtown.

Special Needs. This category does not tie into the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles but is an important component to the Community Development Strategy of the City of Gardner.

It is important the residents of Gardner have equal access to municipal and regional services, activities and programs. To that end, the City will continue to evaluate its ADA Transition Plan and make recommendations where necessary; provide

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auxiliary aids and services that allow municipal communication improvement; increase the support available to persons having special needs, including, but not limited to, the elderly, the homeless, victims of domestic violence, low and moderate income persons and the disabled; expand partnerships with local and regional health, social and human service providers; support efforts of private developers to create affordable and market rate senior housing; expand existing City efforts to rehabilitate substandard housing, particularly inaccessible, multi-family buildings; continue to upgrade the existing infrastructure with ADA compliant curbs and ramps to make travel more accessible; and provide support to address public health priorities including those dealing with addiction, mental health and physical disabilities.

Planning and Implementation The Downtown Urban Renewal Area (D-URA) and the Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Area (MSC-URA) are identified in the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan (DURP). These areas have been identified as high priorities for improvements to infrastructure, removal of slum and blight and business growth. The CDBG Steering Committee identifies projects within these target areas, with projects that are of high concern and have available funding sources taking priority.

FY2018 – FY2021 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PRIORITY LIST

Priority Ranking	Category	Time Frame	Funding Sources	Project or Activity
1	DURP/ ADA	Ongoing	MassDOT Complete Streets, CDBG, Local funds	Reconstruct or alter streets, sidewalks, and public buildings to allow for handicap accessibility and to encourage pedestrian travel.
2	DURP/ ADA	Ongoing	MassDOT Complete Streets, CDBG, Local funds	Upgrade existing infrastructure, particularly in the Downtown Urban Renewal Area and Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Area.
3	Transportation	Ongoing	Local funds, State and Federal grants	Apply appropriate “Smart Parking” standards and strategies and increase availability of parking in the Downtown Urban Renewal Area.
4	DURP	Ongoing	CDBG, Local, State, Federal grants	Implement the approved Downtown and Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Plans
5	Open Space and Recreation	Ongoing	(PARC) Grant, Mass Trails, CDBG CDBG, Local, and other recreational funding sources.	Restore, enhance, build and support diverse recreational facilities and/or activities.
6	Open Space and Recreation	Ongoing	Mass Trails Grant, CDBG, Local, and other recreational funding sources.	Implement the Open Space and Recreation Plan including, but not limited to, acquiring, protecting, and maintaining open space and environmentally sensitive lands
7	DURP	Ongoing	CDBG, Local funds, State and Federal grants	Support and expand economic security and self-sufficiency programs

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8	DURP	Ongoing	Local funds, State and Federal grants	Support social service programs in providing emergency and preventative services such as; substance abuse prevention, homelessness, youth development, fuel and shelter assistance, domestic violence.
9	DURP	Ongoing	CDBG, Local funds, State and Federal grants	Selectively demolish buildings that are beyond reuse in the Target Areas
10	DURP	Ongoing	CDBG, Local funds, State and Federal grants	Rehabilitate dilapidated buildings within the Target Areas (Downtown Urban Renewal Area and Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Area
11	Economic Development	Ongoing	CDBG, Local funds, State and Federal grants	Attract and assist businesses opening in, relocating to, or already existing in, Gardner.
12	DURP	Years 2-3	CDBG, Local funds, State and Federal grants	Redevelop vacant or underutilized land and buildings, particularly in the Urban Renewal Areas.

2. Adjournment

Next Meeting: TBD